

## February 18, 2005- Transportation Bill a Must for West Virginia

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This week, my colleagues on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and I reintroduced a transportation bill extending federal transportation programs and funding for the next six years.

As I have said many times before, I believe the future prosperity of our region and the creation of new jobs are tied to what I call the Three T's - Transportation, Technology and Tourism. The United States Department of Transportation estimates that 47,500 new jobs are created for every \$1 billion spent on infrastructure, so this bill will create thousands of new jobs and jump-start economic development efforts for southern West Virginia. I will be working to secure funding for projects like the King Coal Highway (Interstate 73/74), the Coalfields Expressway, the Shawnee Parkway, the Beckley Bypass and Crosstown Connector and Route 10 in Logan.

Investing money in our state's roads and highways will create better and safer roads. By creating a larger and improved transportation system across the state, we will greatly reduce traffic problems and make traveling in West Virginia much safer. These projects, and the many others which will be possible across the state, will make it safer to travel longer distances or even just on your daily commute across town.

These enhancements will not only benefit residents of the state by improving the safety of our roadways, but the tourism industry will benefit as well. With more people traveling through West Virginia, they will certainly notice the widespread beauty. Many tourists will stay for skiing or whitewater rafting, for hiking or rock climbing, for the Hatfield-McCoy Trail or the Coal Heritage Trail, and for the many other wonderful attractions that West Virginia has to offer. This will bring even more money and jobs and business opportunities to our state, so you can see why I am putting such a large emphasis on this bill and its effect on the future of West Virginia.

This transportation bill is long overdue. There has not been a long-term transportation funding bill signed since 1998. Instead, we have been extending the funding for short periods of time at the same dollar level as the old bill. Unfortunately, funding included in these extensions has not been adjusted for inflation, nor has it taken into account the increased demand placed on our roads and highways. While these extensions have been important and much-needed, our transportation system needs a long-term funding bill that will help both the public and private sectors plan for the future of our highways and roads.

This new bill, The Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy For Users (HR 3), authorizes \$283.9 billion in infrastructure investment, which is \$4.5 billion more than the bill we passed in the House of Representatives last year. That bill never reached the President's desk because the Republican leadership in the House and Senate were unable to come to a compromise. Additionally, there was fear of a Presidential veto because the level of funding was higher than the \$256 billion that President Bush requested. This year, the President asked for \$283.9 billion in his budget and I am glad he has realized - as all West Virginians do - the importance of investing in our infrastructure.

Over the next couple months I will be working to secure funding in this transportation bill for projects across southern

West Virginia. This has been an ongoing process for me and it is one to which I have devoted much of my time. In fact, in last year's House version of the bill I helped secure \$2.2 billion for in West Virginia. Of course, because the bill did not reach the President, this money never reached our state, and another short-term extension was passed instead.

The current short-term funding extension runs out at the end of May. There are a lot of details to work out within the bill and there will likely be much debate on where and how this money will be used. We, in the House, and my colleagues in the Senate, will be working hard to pass the transportation bill and come to a consensus. For the benefit of all of southern West Virginia, it is my hope Congress can pass a bill that, with the President's signature, will provide long-term funding for our infrastructure, while bringing thousands of jobs and numerous economic development opportunities to our area.